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**Outward Appearance, Inward Perceptions: Preservation of Identity
among K'ichee' Women**

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among K'ichee' Women**

by

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Dedication

This work is first dedicated to all Maya women, especially those that have never had the opportunity to be heard. Second, I would like to dedicate this work to my dear friend, María Aguaré Uz. It never could have been a reality without her loving patience, humor, understanding, and wealth of knowledge. *Tyox chawe ma Li'y.*

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I would like to acknowledge two of my previous mentors, Dr. John Rashford and Dr. Brad Huber, who inspired me to pursue my life-long passion in anthropology and the human condition. I cannot thank you enough for your encouragement and imparted wisdom. I would also like to acknowledge my good friend Thomas Hart and his immense knowledge of Guatemala and its peoples that he continues to share with me.

Abstract

Outward Appearance, Inward Perceptions: Preservation of Identity among K'ichee' Women

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Outward Appearance, Inward Perceptions: Preservation of Identity among K'ichee' Women offers a look into the changing patterns of identity and regional Maya clothing among the female members of a rural K'ichee' Maya municipality located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. It provides a brief framework of the history and importance of Maya clothing in Guatemala as well as in the context of the rural Maya community. Building upon a loose theoretical framework based on works by Irma Otzoy (1992, 1996a, 1996b), Clifford Geertz (1997), and Paul Connerton (1989), the current study was aimed at examining the connections that exist between one municipality's female regional style of clothing and the redefining of sacred spaces for cultural and identity preservation and an analysis of historical memory related to material culture. This descriptive study was conducted among a sample of K'ichee' Maya women (N=18) over a two month period in 2010. Qualitative data were collected using an open-ended semi-structured interview guide. Major themes that emerged from the data were the vital

roles that female community members play in the preservation of local culture and the changing and adaptive nature of material culture. The findings suggest that local identities and culture change alongside the changes occurring in municipal traje use, and pride and respect for local origins is preserved through performative ritual.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

CONNECTION

I became acquainted with the community of Kaq Jäl¹, located in the Western Highlands of Guatemala, in 2002 when I was placed there as an animal husbandry volunteer with the United States Peace Corps. From 2002 to 2004, I worked with and lived among the K'ichee' Maya of Kaq Jäl. During this time period I formed deep relationships with the people of the community, participating in various community activities and becoming extremely interested in their culture and customs. By the close of my two years living in the community and forming invaluable lasting bonds with the people there, I had become a community ally, dedicated to working alongside the impoverished families in the villages to better their lives. Though impossible to maintain those relationships post-2004, because of the community's limited to no access to a regular dependable mail service, telephone service, and internet service, I have rekindled them in several recent visits to the community.

My first time back, not having been there in seven years and without regular communication with the people, was quite the emotional arrival. Some much-adored elders, local historians and keepers of community knowledge, who I anticipated interviewing had passed since my 2004 departure, while some younger women with whom I worked seven years ago had married and had children, some of them having moved away to live in the family compound of their husbands. I was amazed at the

¹ Fictional name.

community's rapid growth and change. For example, I was now able to call some participants on their cell phones to schedule interviews. After allowing myself some time to reacclimatize and to realize that Kaq Jäl was not exactly the same place as when I left it, I was able to begin interviews with women in the villages.

During my two years living in the community, my work project primarily focused on women, and, thus, I was usually surrounded by the daily lives of women. My home visits normally took place when adult men were not present, especially during the growing season. This was also the case during my summer interviews. Most women were at home caring for the younger children, the animals, and the house chores. In spending extended amounts of time with women in Kaq Jäl, I became interested in the responsibility that they expressed that they carry related to passing on Maya culture to their children. With this in mind, I chose to design my research around female identity and its connections to *traje*². Only the women in Kaq Jäl continue to wear *traje*. Maya *traje* is defined as a particular style of ethnic clothing historically hand-woven on the back-strap loom. The dominant pieces are the *po't*³ and *uq*⁴, or roughly blouse and skirt.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Body adornment is a universal form of human expression that can make a statement about one's life experience. Clothing is one common medium for this expression (Turner,

² The Spanish word *traje*, translated into English as "suit" or "costume," is used in Guatemala to refer to what is considered traditional Maya clothing.

³ *Po't* is K'ichee' Maya for the traditionally hand-woven blouse worn by Maya women. In Spanish, it is called *huipil* (also spelled *güipil*).

⁴ *Uq* is K'ichee' Maya for the typical woven skirt worn by Maya women. In Spanish, it is called *corte*.

2007). My own observations, as well as those of others (Annis, 1987; Hendrickson, 1995; Otzoy, 1992), reveal that clothing is an important manifestation of self-identity for the women of the Maya community. Interested in researching how women within one small rural community perceive their own identities, I returned to the community of Kaq Jäl. My basic research objectives were to address what identity is to the women of Kaq Jäl, how might it be connected to their outward appearance (i.e. traje), and what are their self-perceptions related to traje use. From these objectives, I proposed the question of what are the ways Maya culture are actively being preserved, if at all, on a rural local level. I desired to know how they view culture and their past, their present state, and the direction they think that their future may take them. To delve into these topics, and to assist me in understanding my research data, I have used a loose theoretical framework based on Irma Otzoy (1992, 1996a, 1996b) and her work on traje being both changing and continuous throughout history, Clifford Geertz (1997) and his writings on the creation/adaptation of new spaces for old traditions, and Paul Connerton (1989) and his work on memory. Through open interviews, I was able to provide a safe background where seldom heard individuals could voice their emotions concerning changes that had taken place and are presently occurring in their community. Participants expressed enthusiasm and surprise in being asked questions directly related to their daily lives.

As mentioned, during my time spent alongside women in Kaq Jäl when I lived in the community, they expressed that they felt like they are the preservers and carriers of their rich heritage. Throughout the research period, I became increasingly fascinated with how and why specific pieces of the feminine culture and community in Kaq Jäl are being

preserved in a quickly-Westernizing world under the great pressures of globalization. I worked with my informants to address how personal and collective identities among the women are affected by change. Upon my arrival, I admit that I had my own preconceived notions about the loss of the traditional and culture and how that might negatively be affecting the women of the community. What participants would reveal would enlighten me and change my perspective. This study offers a look into the changing patterns of identity in a rural Maya community.

METHODOLOGY

The ethnographic information herein related specifically to the community of Kaq Jäl, Guatemala was acquired through my own observations and in-depth interviews gathered from June-August, 2010. In this section I describe the sample, the data collection process, and the data analysis used for the study.

Sample:

My research sample is comprised of eighteen K'ichee' Maya women from 22 to 82 years old (average age=41) from the community of Kaq Jäl. Kaq Jäl is a community often closed to outsiders in which gender divisions are strong. Therefore, I used purposive sampling in selecting the 18 participants. From a practical perspective, purposive sampling allowed me to conduct the study in a relatively short period of time, by building on the rapport I had already established with some of the participants during my time living in the community (2002-2004). In addition to inviting participants that I knew to be good informants, I also used "snowball sampling" to identify key participants. These

included women suggested by the translator. They tended to be elder participants who are known as community leaders, active and vocal preservers of tradition, and who had had prior experience being interviewed and recorded.

From within the municipality⁵ of Kaq Jäl, the participants reside in five of the main politically-defined districts, including four *cantones*⁶ and the central *pueblo*. Within the *cantones*, the participants represent approximately seven *parrajes*⁷, or villages. The participants come from a variety of homes and family compositions, though they all stem from rural indigenous families with traditions of subsistence agriculture. Six of the participants have post-secondary education and technical training. Of these six, several have higher education degrees, one having studied on scholarship at the university level in the United States. The remainder of the participants (N=12) can be split into two groups—those with some primary school education and those with no formal education (i.e. Western style classroom education). Some of the participants are highly educated in local knowledge bases, having completed rigorous and in-depth training and apprenticeship in midwifery, healing, and weaving, for example, but have never been to school. Seven of the participants, including the six that have post-secondary educations, are bilingual (K'ichee'/Spanish), while the rest are more comfortable in their native K'ichee'. Five of the six participants with technical training have a steady form of income, something that was almost unheard of for a female in the recent past. However, they all continue to rely on a combination of various familial incomes to support their

⁵ Each department, or state, in Guatemala is divided into municipalities, similar to the U.S. counties.

⁶ Municipalities are sometimes further divided into areas termed *cantones*.

⁷ *Cantones* are sometimes broken into *parrajes*, or separate small villages.

families throughout the year. Occupations of participants include home caretaker, midwife, healer, market saleswoman, store clerk, NGO field educator, teacher, and nurse. Only home caretaker, midwife and healer are non-paid positions, though they are highly respected positions within the community.

Data collection:

The data collection consisted of a semi-structured style of interview primarily composed of open-ended questions and free dialogue. The interview guide had 28 main questions pertaining to female identity and use of traje in Kaq Jäl and the changes that are occurring in both realms. Use of the interview guide assured basic consistency across interviews, while allowing room for participants to elaborate or digress within topics as they wished. Duration of interviews averaged at 42 minutes. Nine were conducted solely in Spanish without a translator being present; two were conducted in a mix of Spanish and K'ichee', using K'ichee' when needed for clarification and explanation; and seven were conducted in K'ichee' with a translator, translating my questions from Spanish to K'ichee' and participants' responses from K'ichee' to Spanish. I selected the translator on the basis of her deep knowledge of local customs and traditions, her trust and respect with the community members, her fluency in the local dialect, and her prior experience as a translator for other ethnographic projects. Interviews occurred in the homes of the participants, with the participant, the translator, and I present. In some cases, small children, and occasionally other familial adult females were present during interviews. Besides myself as the researcher, in no instance were there any adult males present

during interviews. A portable hand-held digital recorder was used to preserve the interviews.

Data analysis:

My analysis began during the interviews themselves and unfolded as an iterative process over many months. While in the field, I took observational notes to insure that I captured any facial expressions, changes in tone, or other non-verbal cues presented by participants during interviews. Upon return from the field, I listened to each recorded interview at least four times and took extensive notes on important sections pertinent to the study. Next, I transcribed relevant sections, using both Spanish and English, and hand-coded the data from printouts. I used an inductive analysis process, such that recurring themes in interviews were identified from participants' comments and answers to questions. Central aspects and questions, and even complications as the researcher, surrounding the study arose as I later meditated on my interviews and time spent in the field. This approach used in analyzing the data was close to the grounded theory method expanded upon by Glaser and Strauss whereby the theory was inductively extracted from the analysis of the phenomenon it represents (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

LIMITATIONS

There are a few limitations to my work in Kaq Jäl that should be addressed before moving forward. Of primary concern would be myself as the interviewer. I come from a privileged North American white background, and even more importantly, I am a man. I was interviewing women from a marginalized indigenous community, all from

impoverished and rural backgrounds. I was well aware of the axes of difference and inequality that were present and took this into consideration during interviews. In Kaq Jäl there is a gendered power dynamic in which men are generally socially dominant that can be challenging to overcome. Being a male, participants' responses to interview questions could have been what they imagined I wanted to hear or quite limited and edited depending on their comfort level delving into female issues around identity. That being said, I am not from the community, nor am I *Ladino*⁸, the Guatemalan polarization of *indígena*. Therefore, there was some comfort in the fact that personal or private information would be safe with me. Participants were free to discuss emotions involving other community members and outsiders (Ladinos) at will. Word of mouth exchange of information, or "informal channels of communication" (Hendrickson, 1995, p. 18), is prevalent in the community, but not having a stake in my position or role as a community member, women could trust that interviews were confidential.

Because of the trust and friendship I had established in Kaq Jäl, a difficult community to work in, I chose to return there to conduct my research. The participants in this study are my friends. This could have potentially skewed responses to interview questions, or, on the other hand, made the responses generally more colorful and detailed. This is difficult to know. Comparing notes and coding interviews between women with whom I have a close relationship and others whom I do not personally know as well, there is sufficient overlap suggesting most responses were not skewed or tailored. I have

⁸ *Ladino* is the common term used in Guatemala to refer to the dominant ethnic group who claims European ancestry.

attempted to view all of the information gathered and shared objectively and through an unbiased lens.

Another limitation to consider would be the translated nature of the study. The primary language of the community is K'ichee' Maya, in which I am limited. A translator was used for interviews conducted in K'ichee'. Questions were translated from Spanish to K'ichee', and, then, responses were back translated. The precision and accuracy of some of the interviews' translations is questionable. Also, not every nuance in K'ichee' can be accurately translated into Spanish, and this causes a loss, especially given that some of the participants are known to be master historians and story tellers. Between me and the translator, we have done our best to capture all information as accurately as possible.

One final limitation to consider is that the essence of the qualitative research completed for this study is that it provides an in-depth view of a few ideas or concepts involving a small research group in one particular setting, and the findings cannot be generalized to include a broader population than those interviewed.

CHAPTER 2: A Brief History of Maya Traje

I have included this section to present a brief history of Maya traje in Guatemala. My goal is to convey the importance of traje in history and the everyday lives of Maya women and to provide a background in which the localized connection between traje and identity for the women of Kaq Jäl is birthed from.

QATZ'YAQ: OUR CLOTHES

Traje is plausibly the most definitive visual marker of Maya identity (Annis, 1987; Hendrickson, 1995; Otzoy, 1992). Maya traje and Guatemala are practically inseparable. When we think of Guatemalan culture and society today, we quickly imagine colorful images of Maya textiles and the Maya woman “at the loom—clad in her *huipil* of blue and red and orange and a dozen other colors” (Annis, 1987, p. 13). Perhaps that is because the present expressiveness found in the proliferation of traje in Guatemala is directly tied to a lengthy past, before the invention of the modern concept of the Guatemalan state and society. As Sheldon Annis identifies, “textiles have been woven, more or less as they are today, for at least three millennia in Mesoamerica” (Annis, 1987, p. 105). Maya clothing, first woven on the pre-Colombian back-strap loom, became designated as “traje” by and denoted difference from the newly-arrived Europeans (Otzoy, 1996a). *Iximulew*⁹, not Guatemala, was the land Spanish explorers encountered upon arrival. The Maya, with their own worldview far from that of the dominant

⁹ Iximulew, literally “land or place of corn,” is how the K’ichee’ Maya, among other Maya language groups, refer to the country of Guatemala in their own language.

Europeans, were the people who had been occupying the land for centuries. Scholar Irma Otzoy (1996a) points out that traje has its roots in the pre-Colombian/pre-colonial Maya community as proven through a number of designs from that time still in use today, various accounts from early European explorers, pieces of cloth discovered at pre-Colombian archeological sites bearing identical construction as some modern pieces, and the image of the back-strap loom found in artistic renditions in those sites. This has not always been the dominant academic discourse in Guatemala. It is in protest of earlier histories recorded by Ladino scholars that doubt the intrinsic nature of Maya traje (see work by Severo Martínez Peláez and Luz Méndez de la Vega). Interestingly, in my own research, this very controversy was raised by an informant during an interview.

For me, it [speaker's municipal traje] has a lot of meaning. It is the way our grandparents dressed. In fact, this situation would have to be analyzed very well because one says I feel really good to wear this traje because our grandparents did not abandon it...like an inheritance, right?...but other authors say that this was an imposition...as when the Spanish arrived, they distributed the people under their rule...a way not to confuse themselves with the laborers that they had. They gave a color to each group...I still have doubt about this. I am with this, that it was inheritance. But, perhaps truthfully, [this is saying] it was imposed. It is a situation that I am unsure of...I heard this from a university professor. I do not remember the author's name. I want to find the book where it says this. Because, for example, there are various versions of how things were—a version written by a Spaniard, and also by a *criollo*¹⁰, and also by an indigenous person. So, it would have to be analyzed, the versions, to see which is the true story.

Peering still further back in history, as has been retold in oral history and myth and also discovered in archeological findings, there exist the symbolism and imagery surrounding the female deity Ixchel (Macleod, 2004; Otzoy, 1996a). According to the histories told by

¹⁰ The Spanish term *criollo* is sometimes used in Guatemala to identify an individual of European, most commonly Spanish, and indigenous ancestry.

both the Maya experts and outsider scholars, it was this powerful feminine deity that bestowed upon man the gift of the back-strap loom and weaving, among other life-sustaining gifts (Stanzione, 2003).

Of course, traje, just as the Maya people, has not remained static but has changed and adapted with time and history. Despite centuries of subjugation, colonization, domination, and marginalization at the hands of a dominant hegemony, traje has survived as a fundamental form of cultural production and representation, and weaving remains a prized skill in numerous Maya communities (Macleod, 2004). As Melville Herskovits (1966) theorized, it is the most prominent cultural features that are transferred and redefined as necessary to survival in their new cultural environments. And Otzoy makes a strong argument for the continuity of traje use in the Maya community. That being said, there have been moments in history when some Maya have abandoned their traje for a variety of reasons. And this is still taking place among some groups. But we see that when cultural identity is strengthened and made a viable path to survival of group cohesion and power, again identities are apt to be redefined, and the strongest links to cultural ties, sometimes pieces of culture that have previously been left behind or replaced, return. This has sometimes been in the way of traje. Victor Montejo highlights that during the Maya Revitalization Movement in Guatemala even “Ladinoized Maya people who abandoned their traditions a long time ago again adopted them” as a result of the movement (Montejo, 1999, p. 157). In the case of Maya men who abandoned their traje indefinitely, Ricardo Falla observed that “they maintain an indigenous pattern in the way the pieces of clothing are combined, which is unmistakable for indigenous people

themselves” (Falla, 1978, p. 28). Traje in general does not seem to be as socially important for males as females (Hendrickson, 1995). Traje has provided a link to a pre-Colombian past and a medium ripe for new and even hybridized innovative and creative expressions. And though these artistic expressions are sometimes simply romanticized as a beautiful aesthetic by the outsider and the untrained eye, traje is not a neutral cultural element.

***QAWINAQIB’*: OUR COMMUNITY**

A vast array of information surrounding both the wearer’s identity and the identity of the group from which the wearer comes can be gathered about any one individual simply through being “visually literate” (Schevill, 1993, p. 3). I focus on the reading of female traje, as there are currently more communities in which only women continue to don traje. In general, traje is recognized as a particular style of indigenous clothing and is characterized as a general symbol of Mayanness, but there exists a multitude of styles that are created using a variety of techniques, colors, materials, patterns, and designs with meanings that differ from locale to locale. As confirmed by the participants in my own study in the community of Kaq Jäl, a municipal style will immediately indicate to the observer, assuming that the municipality is some-what known by the observer, where a woman is from. They often referred to this style as *traje típico* or just *típico/a* as opposed to *traje de moda* (“fashionable traje”) or *corte de colores* (“multi-colored skirts,” i.e.

skirts of *jaspe*¹¹ cloth) or simply *traje*, generally used by the participants when referring to a generic mass-produced and widely and popularly worn form of huipil and skirt not particularly representing any one region or community. The participants in Kaq Jäl attested that at least some if not all of the following information can easily be gathered in nothing more than a quick glance: what municipality a woman comes from or has married into; what language group, and possibly even what dialect group, she belongs to; if she is a “traditionalist” (meaning preservationist of municipal culture and/or *costumbrista*¹²) or not; and economic standing. As hinted at in a participant’s statement below, municipal *traje* may also speak of wisdom, of past knowledge that not all have access to and that may not be carried in the language of the newer styles.

If a person dresses very Maya, very Maya...with *ropa típica*, *típica*...if we see a person who dresses very regional...immediately, if you need something, you’ll go directly to her because with only the way in which she’s dressed you have already identified that this person can have knowledge.

There may be any number of other technical intricacies that women can translate across municipalities, and even from individual to individual within the same community, such as the craftsmanship, quality, and time employed in creating the *traje*. However, these characteristics are not easily read by the outsider’s eyes (Hendrickson, 1995; Macleod, 2004; Schevill, 1993). These types of details were not elaborated upon in my interviews.

Importantly, a woman can recognize other women from her community and instantly feel security in knowing that she can go to them for help or companionship. This

¹¹ *Jaspe*, also known as *ikat*, yarn is a class of yarn dyed in a specific manner, similar to tie-dyeing, and commonly used to weave cloth for *traje* skirts. Its use in Maya *traje* began somewhere around the early nineteenth century. Its origins have not been confirmed (Schevill, 1993).

¹² The Spanish word *costumbre*, literally “custom,” is often used in Guatemala to refer to Mayan spirituality. *Costumbristas* are what the practitioners are called.

is the collective nature behind municipal traje, what may first appear as mere colors and styles appealing to the individual (Schevill, 1993). What this regional or municipal style of traje is doing is working to transfer locative information; positioning the wearer in a specific time and space; linking her identity to a community, a people, and a unique history and story; and grounding her, giving her meaning before she ever even speaks. She may not physically be in her community, but she takes it with her wherever she may go. As one participant put it, “we’ll find ourselves with others from other *pueblos*¹³...I take with me what is mine to introduce myself or introduce my *pueblo*.” This is evidence of the importance of group representation and recognition. It is apparent to both the wearer and the observer that by donning her regional municipal dress she is preserving the image and custom of her own community. She is not simply representing the Maya as a whole, such as women wearing the generic forms of traje, but she is also representing her own community.

QATZ’YAQ, KATZ’YAQ: OUR CLOTHES, THEIR CLOTHES AND THE POLITICIZATION OF TRAJE

There is a politicization of clothing in Guatemala. When I speak of the politics of traje what I am talking about are the social interactions of the people, including wearer and observer, pertaining to its use and the plays of power and autonomy imbedded in the concept of traje. I am speaking of the contemporary processes in which an individual or

¹³ The participant uses the Spanish words *otros pueblos* and *mi pueblo* here. I do not know whether she is indicating *other towns* and *my town* or *other peoples* and *my people*, as the Spanish *pueblo* can be used in either instance.

group makes the decision to wear a specific clothing, the implications of doing so, and the outside and inside perceptions concerning the actions involved. The political nature of traje in Guatemala in relation to the nation state has its roots in the lengthy and complex history of cultural imposition and forced domination by the foreign European hegemonic state aimed at controlling the masses and, true to some early descriptions of the native peoples, “the bestial character of the Indians” (Todorov, 1984, p. 38). Since these early encounters, the contradistinctions of the “dominator” and the “dominated,” the “powerful” and the “powerless,” the “worthy” and the “worthless” have been ingrained in society. Otzoy articulates that “after the Spanish invasion in the 16th century, the Mayas have suffered economic, social and political subjugation” [my translation] (Otzoy, 1996a, p. 7). Though now more than five centuries have passed since the “discovery” of the Americas and its peoples, much of the same initial attitude of “Columbus’s summary perception of the Indians, a mixture of authoritarianism and condescension” (Todorov, 1984, p. 33) has been harbored by the current hegemony. One participant from Kaq Jäl called attention to the visual discrimination of Maya and how identity revealed through clothing is ignored.

From the beginning they discriminated against us a lot. This was planted in the minds of many women and youth—to dress in traje of your own community is backwards...[to them] our clothing is nothing more than on the outside, it is not what we think, how we analyze ourselves...[our clothing] is a *riqueza*¹⁴ that we should not leave behind.

¹⁴ The Spanish word *riqueza*, translated into English as “wealth,” was commonly used by participants to describe their culture and their municipal traje.

What cultural aspect could more symbolically mark the distinctions that politically and ethnically divide the population than the outward visible difference found in clothing?

In Guatemala, actions and clothing can “say” if an individual identifies as Maya or as non-Maya, or Ladino. As the participants pointed out, “my clothes represent the *pueblo* Maya...[the] Maya woman;” “clothing identifies us as Maya;” “indigenous people dress more simply than Ladinos;” etc. Much of the time in Guatemala clothing style can signify from what ethnicity one comes from, though the ethnic identity that an individual may assume is not predetermined and may differ when in traje and Western-style clothing (Hendrickson, 1995). Women in Kaq Jäl talked about younger girls dressing as Ladinas when they go to the city but not being able to fully transition because they know that on the inside they are Maya. They also routinely discussed women wearing Ladina clothing and speaking Spanish if they had employment outside of the community or attended a university where the majority of the student population would be Ladino. This is because traje has been used to “other” the native Maya population, and when women leave their Maya community and enter the Guatemalan society at large they can immediately be judged by their clothing and presentation. How can there be an “Indian” in a “non-Indian” venue or situation? How can a rural, un-educated Maya interact in an urban and chic environment? Below is a response that a woman in Kaq Jäl gave when asked if wearing her traje outside of her community had ever caused any problems for her.

Now, not anymore, but before, like ten years ago, the students that studied at the high school level could not enter with their traje. Like ten or fifteen years ago, they could not enter with their traje—not in universities or high schools...when

they worked in the capital, the same, they had to leave behind their traje. If they worked in restaurants or the business district, not there either. Nowadays, this still exist, but it's less. Now, how do they treat you, right? When one is traveling, they discriminate against you. They totally discriminate against you because they treat us, the indigenous, as if we are less than Ladinos. The treatment is different...less...they always treat us less—that they are Indians, that they don't know anything, that they are not intelligent, something like that. One time when I was studying in Guatemala at the university, I left in a bus with my backpack. I sat down. A Ladina sat down beside me, an older woman. She looked at me. I had my lunchbox for the university. She said to me, 'You, where are you going?' I just told her the zone [of the city] I had to go to. I already knew why [she was asking], what her intentions were. So, I didn't tell her I was going to the university, but only to the zone. 'Are you looking for work?' she said to me. Well, if there was work, because one needs work, this could be nice, right? 'If you like, come work with me.' I didn't want to work in a house but something in an office or something like that because I was studying also. So, she said to me 'If you want, work as my *muchacha*¹⁵.' It was very discriminating.

There have been periods in Guatemalan history when the discrimination and the “othering” have been so strong that it threatened the survival of Maya culture, traje included. The political and ethnic violence that Guatemalan Mayas encountered during the 36-year long civil war is still pronounced in the minds of Kaq Jäl community members. During the worst years of the war, many Maya women completely left their traje behind to evade identification by the brutal military or to more smoothly mesh into their new surroundings as refugees (Montejo, 1999). In some cases, the paramilitary would target individuals and families in known villages (known trajes) for supposedly aiding national military or refusing to work alongside the paramilitary, and the national military would target them for supposedly aiding paramilitary. In some instances, these allegations against villagers were truthfully happening, but in other instances they were

¹⁵ The Spanish word *muchacha*, translated into English as “girl,” is used here in a derogatory manner indicating *maid* or *servant girl*.

nothing more than rumors. In either case, the consequences were often unspeakable. When attempting to flee the horrors of Guatemala and illegally cross the border into Mexico, not only were they being pursued by the Guatemalan military but also by the Mexican military who could recognize them as illegal by their Guatemalan Maya trajes (Montejo, 1999). In the quote below, a Kaq Jäl participant recounts the fear in the community during this era.

I don't remember...there was a governor, a president...I believe it was General Lucas¹⁶ or another...I don't remember that well as I was still young. He was going to force all indigenous people to wear pants or *vestido*¹⁷...between 1970 and 1980. It was horrible, during the war. They said that if a woman is not going to speak Spanish and is not going to change out of her traje, she is going to die. All of those in *vestido* and that speak Spanish, only they will remain. It was going to be a decree I think, but thank God, who knows how, it was not decreed. I mean, it was not carried out. There were still rumors—that is what the president was still thinking, that he was going to decree this. It did not happen. But during the time of *la violencia*¹⁸ there were some that had to change their clothing¹⁹.

Though there has been a history of sometimes discarding traje for fear of extreme racism or even death, the Maya have nevertheless been able to maintain a strong sense of self (Nash, 2004). Another history stands in opposition to the history of violence—it is a history of resistance to the nation state and the hegemony through traje use.

¹⁶ General Fernando Romeo Lucas García was president of Guatemala from July 1978 to March 1982. He has been credited with the start of a national genocide, amplified by his successor General José Efraín Ríos Montt, during the civil war in which Maya communities were disproportionately massacred (Carmack, 1988).

¹⁷ The Spanish word *vestido*, translated into English as “dress” or “clothing,” is often used by Maya to indicate Western style clothing or Ladino clothing.

¹⁸ The Spanish term *la violencia*, translated into English as “the violence,” is commonly used in Guatemala to refer to the civil war.

¹⁹ This specific piece of history that the participant referred to has not been confirmed as true. Regardless, this is what she remembers and it incited real fear in many people.

From the colonial times, there has been a silent resistance through clothing among the Maya. Faced with very slim chances of improving their lives under the conditions of colonialism and domination, silent resistance may have been their only choice as a survival technique (Annis, 1987). It was not brought out and voiced on a national scale until the late 1980's-early 1990's when the Maya Revitalization Movement was moving forward with an agenda of cultural preservation. With this grew a sense of pride around Maya culture and a redefining of indigeneity and national history by the native Guatemalans, including an empowerment of the feminine voice and a promotion of a shared pan-Maya ethnicity and cause. This was able to more fully bloom under the new Peace Accords (1996) following the civil war in which indigenous identity and rights are recognized. Though they have been formally recognized by the state, their fair treatment has not been fully implemented (Stern, 2005). At this time, the Maya woman began to break away from her destiny that had historically been controlled by others (Barrios-Klée Ruiz). According to some, it is the *mujer maya* that legitimizes the indigenous Guatemalan movement, as she represents strength in tradition and indigenous identity through her traje while actively participating in a modern mobilization (Nelson, 2001).

With this form of resistance strengthened, women who had access to the information formulated by the cultural movement, mostly dominated by male scholars in urban areas, wore their trajes proudly and defiantly. In the eyes of the nation state, "being Mayan, specifically a Mayan woman, meant resisting the dominant Ladino culture" (Stern, 2005, p. 112). A woman may make the individual decision to continue to proudly don her Maya garb not only in daily routines taking place in her community but extending into routines

common in the society at large outside of her community. She wears her traje, projecting “a ‘visible language’ (aesthetic selections) and a ‘language of silence’ (with political significance),” (Otzoy, 1996b, p. 147) in every situation, despite the fact that the influential Western world which surrounds her has dictated that one has to look a certain look and act a certain act in order to move forward and successfully operate in the world at large. Through her actions, she becomes a symbol that she and her people are resisting the dominant culture’s definition of how to be successful. She is making the statement that she will make her own decisions about how to be successful, and that the definition of success in the first place is not solely decided by hegemonic forces. As said by Otzoy (1996b), her survival and her success depend upon her culture of weaving and traditional clothing. The pre-existing system that has been pushed upon every national citizen has now been gently confronted by a counter-system launched from the shadowy periphery, from the marginalized subaltern sidelines, and by a woman in a male-dominated society no less. She is not the only person involved—her entire community, and her entire pan-community, is now involved. Whether she consciously realizes it or not, she is resisting the controlling hegemony.

We see that there is friction between the history of the nation state and the Maya, but the modern nation state does not totally reject the cultural aesthetics of the Maya. The nation state has “othered” the Maya to its advantage. The Maya and their weavings have been used in national and international advertising, on tourism flyers and posters, on post cards, and even in live displays inside of businesses where Maya women sit on the floor cross-legged spinning yarn and weaving textiles for tips. Guatemala uses the Maya as “a

variation on the packaging of ethnic performance for sale” (Schein, 2000, p. 100). This entails the production of culture for sale, a valuable commodity for Guatemala. Just as Louisa Schein (2000) noted in the case of China, which can be transferred over to the Guatemalan case, in an overwhelmingly non-indigenous male dominated society, women, and especially indigenous women, are utilized to symbolically represent the difference and the uniqueness of the nation. This uniqueness makes Guatemala stand out from its Central American neighbors and brings in international travelers. The portrait of the Maya woman and her weavings has been transformed into a national symbol for the promotion of tourism (Annis 1987). The nation state has decided what indigeneity should look like when economically or politically convenient, which has resulted in the construction of a limited indigenous identity. Are Maya women all clad in colorful finery sitting stoically at the back-strap loom or happily hauling water in clay jugs down rural picturesque mountainous paths leading to humble impoverished villages? This is often how and where the nation state wants the indigenous population in order to generate economic revenue.

CHAPTER 3: Kaq Jäl

SITE DESCRIPTION

Na'tasibal

Chi ri'
je kape jun chaj chupinaq,
inku'l chuchi' taq ja,
inmoy rumal ri q'aq' k'i kiwachibal,
in t'or rumal ri tartatem re ch'ich';
kinna'tisanik.

Uk'ok'al juyub,
ruxlab kikis ama' taq chij,
ruxlab q'ayes,
ruxlab tinamit...

Are k'ut ri nuboqoch
man kakiq'i ta ri na'tasibal.

Recuerdo

Aquí
como ocote apagado,
acuchillado en una acerca,
ciego de luces de colores,
sordo de bocinas y ruidos,
recuerdo.

Fragancia de montañas,
olor a estiércol de carneros,
olor a hierba,
olor a pueblo...

Y mis ojos
no soportan el peso del recuerdo.

--Humberto Ak'abal, 2009.

As one departs Santa Cruz del Quiché, the present-day capital seat of the department of El Quiché, Guatemala, located near the ruins of the famed Q'umarkaj²⁰, and heads north-west across the central highlands the road winds through a scattering of smaller townships before coming upon the entrance to a little town cradled at around 1, 800 meters above sea level between the Sierra Madre and Cuchumatanes mountain ranges. This is the town of Kaq Jäl. Kaq Jäl, also the name of the municipality, had a total estimated population of 21,000 inhabitants in 2010 according to the Guatemalan National

²⁰ Q'umarkaj was the capital of the K'ichee' Maya kingdom in the Late Postclassic Period, a powerful city upon Spanish arrival in the 16th century (Carmack, 1981).

Institute of Statistics (“Estimaciones de la población,” 2008). Besides the municipal capital, the remaining area is comprised of seven *cantones*, each having from six to twenty-three *parrajes*.

Kaq Jäl is an impoverished rural area populated by K’ichee’ Maya. The majority of the population inhabits the small villages outside of the town, and most citizens practice small-scale sustainable agriculture, growing primarily corn; several varieties of beans; squash; chile; avocado; various citrus fruits; among other native fruits and wild harvested plants. Some families have limited animal production. Besides agriculture, there are a handful of small business owners among other various occupations. There is little income circulated in the community. It is geographically far from the departmental capital from where all state funds and services are allocated, and there is an absence of quality roads to and from the capital. Thus, for example, the municipality was late, within around the last 10 years, to get its first, and still only, secondary school (T. Hart, personal communication, June 13, 2011). The community experienced direct conflict during the height of the civil war in the 1980’s, and this has left irreparable damage and scarring both physically and psychologically to the community and its members. Like many of the rural Maya communities of the highlands, it is, thus, a rather closed community not immediately very trusting of outsiders and their influence.

Until recently, within the lifetime of the eldest community members, *Kaq Jäl* has been fairly isolated and slow to change. It has a long history of a lack of outside influence. Before within living memory, according to oral histories, a bordering municipality, in which *Kaq Jäl* still belonged to, violently expelled the Catholic priest

after word surfaced that he had continued to charge taxes when the King of Spain had already dissolved this practice. The community remained without a Catholic priest for over 150 years. Catholic clergy did not return to the area until the early 1940's, and then only sporadically (Hart, 2008). The clergy all but disappeared from the area during the bloodiest years of the civil war, targeted for supporting the lives of families in marked villages (Carmack, 1988; Falla, 1978). Because of this, combined with the fact that the municipality is rather spread out and there are villages significantly isolated from main roads and highways, Mayan spirituality, vigorously incorporating the local *cofradías*²¹, was able to firmly establish itself. Even today, most hilltops surrounding Kaq Jäl, as well as personal homes, possess a Mayan altar where active ceremonies occur daily. Though there are now a number of small Evangelical congregations mostly concentrated in the town, their members are not nearly as prominent as Catholics and *costumbristas*.

In addition to the history of a lack of a strong Catholic parish, the weekly market circuit, a principal way that outside influence can come into a village, was fairly late to reach Kaq Jäl. It apparently did not begin in Kaq Jäl until around 1935, although it may have been some time before outside venders arrived (Falla, 1978). Elder women in the community still remember a time when the majority of women only wore the municipal traje. The market circuit and outside venders had not yet brought in foreign traje. The emphasis on a localized identity remained strong and ingrained itself into the minds of women. Hand-woven articles of clothing created in private homes still carry deep

²¹ The *cofradía*, or confraternity, having its roots in European Catholicism but syncretized with Mayan spiritual practice in the Americas, is a powerful primarily indigenous civil-religious hierarchical brotherhood charged with organizing public religious festivals and maintaining the integrity, rituals, and celebrations surrounding a town's patron saint(s) (Hawkins & Adams, 2005).

significance in the community, as evidenced through my in-depth interviews, as well as in a 2008 site study conducted by the University of San Carlos which notes that one of three major *artesanal* arenas in Kaq Jäl is *confección de prendas de vestir*, or clothing apparel (Oliva Cuguá, 2008).

Politically, until 2008, elections for the municipal mayor rotated from *cantón* to *cantón*, meaning that in order to run one had to be from the specific *cantón* that was in line for the seat for that election year. Candidates had to be approved by a council of community elders before progressing further. This system, considered a more Maya way of operating, contradicted the modern democratic system employed in other areas of the country (T. Hart, personal communication, June 13, 2011). Participants remarked that this has caused much grief among those in favor of the traditional system.

When I was living in Kaq Jäl seven years ago, there were few personal vehicles, two rotating community vans for in and out transport, one paved road, no internet, no cell phone service, very few concrete block or multiple story homes (often-times a sign of *remisas*—“remittances”—coming from the US), and virtually no females who wore anything other than Maya traje. Upon my return to conduct my research in the summer of 2010, the town center, which now includes a bank and several other previously-foreign businesses, had grown significantly. All of the above-mentioned things minimally or not at all present just seven years ago are now very present. With more available transportation and improved roads, there is easier access to several close urban areas. This, as well as the construction of an improved market area finished in 2005, has also contributed to the growth of the weekly market. There is now more income flow due to

more flux in recent years of their population in search of viable employment, to and from urban Guatemalan cities and the USA. In short, this is a community that is currently undergoing much change and influence. The further away, more isolated villages have seen less change, but in the town center and adjacent areas, it is almost palpable.

Traditional knowledge and innovative technologies strive to occupy the same space.

Adherence to tradition and change are both very present in the same moment, and many times in the very same individuals.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE KAQ JÄL TRAJE

Ukayib'al

Ri ukayib'al re ri qakem
man keqolow taj:

xwi keq'elob'ik.

Colores

Los colores de nuestros tejidos
no destiñen:

sólo envejecen.

--Humberto Ak'abal, 2001.

“And as that culture changes, even splits under the pressure of religious conversion, the woven texts rewrite themselves to express the deeper underlying changes in communal values and self-identity.”

--Sheldon Annis, 1987.

As documented, cultural forms and interpretations and meanings behind those forms are not static. As Eric Hobsbawm highlights in *The Invention of Tradition* (1992), tradition and the traditional is practically an illusion. The Kaq Jäl traje has experienced

change and continues to experience change. The oldest living form is referred to as what is currently the traditional. Participants chose to use the word *change* versus *loss* when discussing regional, or municipal, traje. The word *loss* was used to describe a decline in cultural appreciation or practice among the youth leaving the community in search of work, but not to describe the clothing itself. The municipal traje is still being utilized, though not on a daily utilitarian basis as before. There are several notable changes that have taken place in living community members' lives. I would like to recount the evolution of the Kaq Jäl traje here to illustrate that what may be perceived as loss of the traditional to those on the outside is in actuality a change in cultural production and reproduction. This evolution was told to me by various participants and comes from a number of personal histories. Though each participant told me the history of local traje in her very own eloquence and style, I unfortunately, do not have adequate room here to capture each history. Instead, I have done my best to mesh the common elements and facts into one work. Much of the municipality's history given below was provided to me orally by various local informants.

A small population of sheep herders came from a bordering municipality in the early 1700's to populate the vacant hills around what is now Kaq Jäl²². They brought with them a distinct style of clothing indicating the town from which they came. Participants described the earliest known traje in the area. I cannot be sure if this is what was actually worn by the inhabitants in the 1700's, but this is a piece of the oral history passed on to

²² This information was gathered from historical documents maintained by the municipal government. They unfortunately do not include dates recorded or authors' names.

living members of the community from their elders. For women, the traje consisted of a simple old style of huipil woven from a native variety of cotton, referred to by my informants in Spanish as the *manta* or *sábana* huipil; a modest mostly black corte; a black head wrap; a smaller colored head wrap hidden inside of the larger black one; and a necklace of polished red stones. This was the everyday wear, and, as stated by participants, a unifying symbol of solidarity and ancestry.

The initial changes in the municipal traje were occurring around the time the elders were born. These changes were from the last of the manta styles, that is virtually no longer worn, though most know of it, to the current municipal huipil, which I will term the red huipil, as red is the dominant color. More money and time are required to fashion the red huipil. According to elders, only those with income for the different threads required of the red huipil could afford to weave what is basically the current municipal huipil. As one participant put it, “And the manta, the majority of women used that one because only those who didn’t have money used it...and because the majority didn’t have money, they only used the manta. So, only women whose husbands had the money to buy it [materials for the red huipil] used it [red huipil]. But they were few who used it.” If a woman wore it she was considered to have money, usually through her husband. It was more expressive and, it was viewed as a status symbol. Overtime, as the required thread became available and more income was being generated by men in the community, more women were able to afford to weave it. Some informants commented that it was mainly husbands competing that were pushing wives to change. Not all interviewed agreed upon

this. More women began wearing the red huipil until the older manta style became thought of as the huipil of the poorest community members.

The red huipil with the black corte became the common municipal traje and was now the clothing of everyday use, not simply reserved for a few with steady income. Though there was some form of income, the community was not wealthy by any measure. The red huipil now represented a predominantly impoverished community, as the manta once had. At this time, these changes were happening across a rather large geographic area, before Kaq Jäl was an official municipality. The area had remained a distant settlement of the bordering municipality from where the first pastoral settlers had come from. Today, there are two or three separate municipalities that have almost identical municipal traje that all arose from the same origins. Of course, the local experts can distinguish them from one another, but to the untrained eye they basically appear the same.

The elders who participated in my interviews recall a time when there was nothing seen but the red and black municipal traje. During an interview with the eldest participant, the translator explained, “When she was born, she remembers that all women [in Kaq Jäl] used *traje típico*...no one used this corte [*de colores*], but it was the purely Kaq Jäl traje...[now] they are few, maybe 3 or 4, no more, that wear it daily...the huipil and the corte...but it’s true, there are 3 or 4 elders that have never worn anything else.” The participant went on to explain, as did several other elder participants, that she will never take off her municipal corte that she was born into, and she will be buried in it. Interestingly, in Kaq Jäl, it is not so much the huipil that is the focus of local identity, but

the municipal corte. Women remarked that it is the most traditional piece of Kaq Jäl traje. This is because it is the one piece that has been constant for over 100 years.

With the outside influence that was coming into the community via the market system, estimated at around forty to fifty years ago by participants, and with more community members, mainly male small-time entrepreneurs, who had traveled back and forth between various communities and regions of the country, more styles of Maya traje, both municipal styles from other areas and mass-produced generic styles not particularly from any one place, began to trickle into the everyday lives of Kaq Jäl. In a similar change as the change from the manta huipil to the red huipil, men who had income began to purchase other, and often more expensive, more fine, more detailed, or more colorful, styles of traje for their wives. The translator commented on a participant's statements that "when she was young, [she says] some changed, but only a few...because you needed money and it was expensive, the corte *de colores*. Those that had money used it. Now, the majority uses it, but before, as she remembers, forty years ago, it was the majority that used the Kaq Jäl traje." A few participants told me that, once again, this was a way that men were boasting their wealth and differentiating themselves from the common Kaq Jäl citizen. This has been documented in other works, as well (Wellmeier, 1998). One woman mentioned husbands who were traveling merchants and would buy municipal trajes from other areas and bring them back as gifts for their wives. "It's from the men that had businesses or would leave and maintain a bit of money...and they liked the corte *de colores*. The men liked them and tried to find ways to get money to buy them for their women. In other words, it's the men that changed the women." Non-native traje, as I was

told, carried a message that a woman or her husband either had money or was well-traveled, and thus more worldly and less tied to rural life. In today's Kaq Jäl, it is the generic Maya traje that predominates.

It changed [from Kaq Jäl traje to the generic traje] because of the commercial vendors, when there were many *de colores* weavers. They wanted to sell and so they came here, and when the people saw these cortes they liked them and they tried to find ways to find money to buy them, as they liked them...little by little, the people went to buy them and the vendors, wanting to sell and please clients, looked for other colors and styles...*traje típico* started to disappear.

Many of these new styles were more complex, in design and color among other details, than the municipal traje in Kaq Jäl. When asked further about what motivated the changes in Kaq Jäl, participants commented that women simply liked the option of having diversity in traje. Some women simply liked other colors, styles, and materials that had not been widely available before, or enjoyed the new fashionable nature of traje. I have recently seen the municipal traje woven in non-traditional colors (shades of purple), something that I never saw only seven years ago, drawing from an antique concept to create a new vision.

Women today who cannot afford to buy other styles continue to wear the Kaq Jäl traje. A relatively new phenomenon in Kaq Jäl is that women who cannot afford to purchase or make their young growing daughters traje will dress them for as long as possible in used Western-style clothing, as it is abundant and cheaper than traje. Women confided in me that they could afford to clothe their entire family in Western-style clothing for what one matching huipil-corte pair might cost. They said that they will

typically save money for traje for when young daughters become young women and it will no longer be socially acceptable for them to only be seen in Western-style clothing.

In today's Kaq Jäl, the municipal traje is a rare sight. It has mostly been replaced in its daily use by other styles of traje, but it has gained a new appreciation and status because of its decline. It has not been lost but changed, and this change has heightened its importance within the community, which I will address later. The following quote hints at where the evolution of the municipal traje is at present. "So, a more expensive corte, or a corte with different designs, a huipil, or belts...this has had influence, I think, on the fact that they do not use the clothing [from here]...but, the people of Kaq Jäl are returning to the [municipal] traje."

EMOTIONS

Consejo

- Hablá con cualquiera
no vayan a pensar que sos mudo,
me dijo el abuelo.

- Eso sí, tené cuidado
que no te vuelvan otro.

--Humberto Ak'abal, 2009.

In Kaq Jäl, change has not transpired in a fluid manner without powerful emotions attached. The evolution of the Kaq Jäl traje has taken time and has acted as a catalyst in creating oppositional attitudes around change. I am including this section in order to

place emphasis on the realization that cultural change in a community that has been slow to change has been both divisive and unifying and has represented a true test of identity.

There were divisions created by the earliest changes from the manta to the red huipil, chiefly around economics. But these changes evolved into changes from one municipal style to another, new, municipal style. Much of the strife was resolved when the red huipil became more accessible and adopted as the dominant marker of local identity. Interviewees spoke more of struggle among women surrounding the early changes from the municipal traje to non-municipal styles. The several quotes below are representative of similar sentiments across interviews.

- She says that they had a bad opinion about them [the women who changed from municipal traje to other styles of traje] because they changed the pueblo and now they were not from here. They didn't consider themselves from here but from other municipalities—they felt or believed that they were from other municipalities...and they know well that they were from here...and they had a bad opinion about those that hadn't changed. They [those women that had not changed] didn't like that they changed the municipality...and they had a bad opinion about those who had not changed—[they said] why don't they want to change, probably because they don't have money to change.
- The women who didn't change [from their municipal traje] had a bad opinion of the women who changed because they said that they no longer identify with Kaq Jäl.

The dynamics of female communication were changing. The rural Maya community has historically been organized in a collaborative, collective nature (Ajpacajá Túm, 2001; Foxen, 2007; Wellmeier, 1998). One would define the individual as to what role it fits into in relation to and as a part of the whole (Menchú, 1998). As a result of the first changes from the municipal traje possibly around 60 years ago (though this likely did not

rise in popularity until somewhat later), there was panic that some of the group was either losing or denying its collective identity that had been so critical throughout its history. As described by participants, either by what they had witnessed in their lifetimes or had only heard through oral history, there was the impression of more unity in the community before when all members of the group dressed identically. As Sheldon Annis wrote, “their graphic compositions” were “the shared product of their collective consciousness” (Annis, 1987, p. 116). And just as others have found, it was especially the elders that condemned those that set aside the sacred clothing that they had been wearing their entire lives (Montejo, 1999). From information gathered in interviews and observations, it appears that with the combination of simple change (because of more variety being available in the expanding market circuit) and neoliberalism’s outside influence and emphasis on the individual consumer, the local politics of traje and identity became more complex. The focus on traje as being a locative marker and a symbolic indicator of membership, which had existed for generations, was now being refigured.

Women began to make judgments as to which faction a member of the group was affiliated, the local or the foreign; the conservative or the liberal; the traditionalist or the nouveau; the poor or the wealthy; the proud or the ashamed; the respectful or the disrespectful. This created schisms in the group. There was a breach in a shared identity and the collective consciousness (Annis, 1987). There were those that held onto the group solidarity and those that followed the neoliberal economic model. Those that changed focused more on the individual and what she wanted to express regardless of what the group was doing, as well as on individual wealth in traje. These attitudes regarding

economic wealth spread out into the social and cultural realms of the community. The former essence of what traje was on the community level was being challenged.

Meanings are never a constant in changing environments and thus have the ability to cause fierce disagreement (Hall, 1997). An elder's memories on this issue are translated below.

[She says] interior impacts, yes...more psychological impacts...women who did not change said bad things to those who did...but they are from the same culture, the same economic level, supposedly. She is speaking more to the changes in Maya clothing, not to *ropa ladina* because that is not really present here. When they changed from the traditional to the *corte de colores*, they mistreated each other. They said, they are stuck up, they changed their clothing...that maybe they didn't even make their money, but that they stole it so that they could buy [the other traje]. This was an embarrassment that women were using clothing not from their community.

During interviews, women discussed the fact that eventually more and more women began incorporating non-municipal styles of traje into their everyday wear. The Maya Revitalization Movement, mentioned in Chapter 2, was developing around the same time that this practice was really in full force, and its push towards an indigenous cultural awakening among a pan-Maya ethnicity may have had influence over some women's preoccupation on the local. Honoring one's roots was voiced as a necessity, while also donning other municipal trajes came to signify support of Maya dignity across language and geographically-separated groups (Hendrickson, 1995). Incorporation of other trajes into one's wardrobe also symbolized a well-traveled or conscious female leader. Simply by wearing any Maya traje, regardless of if it was one's municipal dress, one was making a statement of pride in Maya heritage. Just as Hendrickson observed, "Maya identity is expressed in a multitude of ways, and even the strong tie between an Indian woman and

handwoven municipal dress can be violated without calling into dispute her commitment to her heritage” (Hendrickson, 1995, p. 57). Though the schisms and *chisme*, or gossip, about to which faction or camp a woman might pertain to persisted, they were minor. As at this time a limited number of women were leaving to work in cities and were sometimes returning in Western-style clothing, or *ropa ladina*, the focus of the divisions within the community were adapted to the struggle to maintain Maya traje in general versus Western-style clothing. And the *chisme* and judgments about those appropriating Western-style clothing served to keep the group in check, as they continue to do so. The following quote is from a local school teacher who had to walk several miles from her home to arrive at a village primary school where she taught. She wore pants as they were more comfortable for the hike and allowed her to reach the school in less time. She speaks of meeting people on the road.

When I arrived in pants, they said to me ‘good morning,’ ‘goodbye’ in Spanish. They didn’t speak to me in K’ichee’. I didn’t feel good. I felt bad because it was as if I am not from this culture. My people were saying to me *adiós, buenos días*. I said to them *b’ena, saqarik*. When I said to them ‘goodbye,’ ‘see you tomorrow’ [in K’ichee’], they simply stared at me...because I didn’t have on traje. They didn’t think I was from Kaq Jäl. They thought I was from another place. So, I began speaking to them in K’ichee’, and I said, yes, I am from Kaq Jäl.

In another story shared by two friends, they were scheduled to attend a meeting of Maya women a few towns over. They had to hitch-hike to get there and decided to wear pants for the journey. When they arrived, they found that they were the only two women present not in traje. The stares were practically unbearable, and they felt heavy with shame and embarrassment. Western-style clothing for women in Kaq Jäl is tolerable to a point. Participants said that it has its specific functions, such as comfort for hiking long

distances, playing active sports, certain urban jobs, among others, but they all condemned it as a complete replacement for Maya traje and further affirmed that no known woman in Kaq Jäl has totally transitioned to Western-style clothing. In the words of one participant, “If I am Maya but hang out with lots of Ladinas, and if I don’t have good self-esteem, I will go to the other side...like a loss or alcoholism, not that these things are Ladino...but she is leaving something that she should not lose.” They made a clear distinction between what they thought about women attempting to be Ladina and alter their identities and Maya women who simply wore Ladina clothing for a necessary function, not because they really preferred to do so. All participants prefer traje to Western-style clothing. Even though pants and blouses have their function, they are socially less-comfortable than traje.

One important interview question asked if outward appearance is directly connected to inward identity. Not only did all participants answer affirmatively to the above-referenced question, but they also unequivocally agreed that the most visible sign of female identity in Kaq Jäl is traje. When questioned whether the municipal traje is worn today, they unanimously explained a minority, mostly elders, wear it daily, and that besides these few individuals, it is seldom worn. They all indicated that they like the municipal traje and commonly described it as *muy elegante*, very elegant. They continued by commenting that it denotes that they are from Kaq Jäl and that it stands as a representation of their local identity. All participants concurred that this aspect of municipal traje is important. One participant said, “It is different, the clothing...there is a difference from where one comes from...you can know one’s *pueblo* or one’s

cantón...so, those from Kaq Jäl are different from [others]. Yes, it's like that...your heart, your idea. Those from [another town] from us from Kaq Jäl...it's not the same.” Another stated, “[My clothing] represents my reflection...this is how I am inside. A part is externalized, but not everything, right?” As a result of municipal traje use in decline, did this indicate a notable change in the community's female identity, and how might this be affecting the community's solidarity? Did a shared female identity still exist, and, if so, how was it being nurtured? And what would constitute membership in the community for women in the future? Participants seemed to think that there is no major change or loss in local identity. They universally agreed that traje is directly connected to identity, but even if an individual wanted to leave her traje behind, she could not—as hard as she might try—abandon not only her Maya identity but her local identity. I came to realize that as more women changed out of the clothing that they had known their whole lives, the municipal traje gradually rose to a different status, not of one rarely seen on the poor few but rarely seen on the entire community at once. A shared female local identity does still exist. It has been redefined to fit into a new version of the old space and time that it occupied.

CHAPTER 4: Kaq Jäl Identity and Preservation

REAUTHENTICATION, THE KAQ JÄL TRAJE

Necesidad

A veces es necesario
perder algo,
sólo así
uno comienza a buscar.

Y sin querer
encuentra cosas que,
de no ser por lo perdido,
no las habría encontrado
nunca.

--Humberto Ak'abal, 2009.

The municipal traje, through its various evolutionary stages, has provided a sense of stability for the Kaq Jäl woman in unique spaces of continuity. Though 17 of the 18 women interviewed do not wear it on a daily basis, or even very often in most cases, all of them own it and reserve it for special occasions and the community's most sacred happenings when there is the desire and necessity to look *muy elegante*. It is during these periods in which a woman outwardly expresses her sense of local pride, community, ethnic unity, and connection to the time and space that Kaq Jäl both previously occupied and presently occupies. These happenings have been traditions for generations, however it is the invented tradition of these events being the sole specific times and spaces allocated as demanding a mandatory dress code in the form of the municipal traje that is

using history and the past as “a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion” (Hobsbawm, 1992, p. 12).

These local happenings are nothing new to the community—community events, cultural gatherings, various ceremonies, *fiestas*, *ferias*²³ and saints days, *Wajxaqib’ B’atz’*²⁴, *sones*²⁵ and *bailes*²⁶ have always been attended by local women adorning themselves in their best municipal traje. According to participants, some have even saved money over the course of months in order to purchase new, freshly woven pieces for special events. However, in the past, there was a major difference—the municipal traje was not only reserved for these events. It was worn on a daily basis. With the changes in styles outlined in the previous sections, the municipal traje gradually fell out of daily use for the majority. These special events, comprised of the most sacred, the most celebratory, and the most social events of the year, represent a creation of an indispensable time and space that preserves the traje and the identity of Kaq Jäl women. I propose that these creations first happened organically, as the events simply continued through time, but evolved into consciously-invented traditions of municipal traje and identity preservation with the decline of the traje’s everyday use. Women were creating space for the return of the collective consciousness.

²³ The Spanish word *feria*, translated into English as “fair,” is used in Guatemala to denote “town fair” in celebration of saints’ days, Guatemalan Independence (September 15, 1821), among other national and local holidays.

²⁴ *Wajxaqib’ B’atz’*, or Eight B’atz’, is the date of the 260 day sacred Maya calendar for the start of a new year.

²⁵ The Spanish word, *son*, is used in Guatemala to refer to the type of dance that accompanies marimba music. *Sones* can refer to the social dances in which the marimba is played.

²⁶ The Spanish word *bailes*, or dances.

- Sometimes, I wear it, for an activity. Of course, I like it...because it's how we identity ourselves. I like it because I don't want to say that I am forgetting where I am from, from where I come, no. For community activities...yes, we always use it.
- Sometimes activities like that happen where one must go and experience it...the *feria*, for example, is a space to take good advantage of, to experience what is our culture...and this is where it [municipal traje] is used a lot...the women, yes, they have it.

Along the lines of what Clifford Geertz (1973) theorized in regards to ritualized events and materials occupying the sacred realm in Indonesia, in its sacred place the municipal traje commands a certain reverence and commitment. No longer a part of the bore of everyday life, it has totally moved into a powerful realm where it is deeply involved in the direction of the behavior and actions of the citizens of Kaq Jäl. At one time thought of as old-fashioned and ragged, the municipal traje is now described as something very much “liked” and positively-regarded. Participants in this study, much like the participants in Carol Hendrickson’s famous studies in Tecpán, Guatemala, said that it symbolizes *los valores*, or values, connected to what Geertz (1973) called a “deep moral seriousness” (p. 120), that should not be forgotten. Thus, as things change and adapt with time and globalization, *los valores* of the ancestors are reauthenticated in the performative ritual actions of community events and carry over into daily use throughout the year (Durkheim, 1947). Kaq Jäl’s moral and aesthetic features and approach to identity and society, what Geertz referred to as ‘ethos’ and ‘world view’ in the *Interpretation of Cultures* (1973), are defined and married in these ritual events. It is the municipal traje that stands as a symbol of this marriage.

The municipal traje is the ultimate key to acceptance and female citizenship in Kaq Jäl, and as such it is guarded as a precious rarely-worn reserved piece of finery, washed, pressed, and tightly folded and hidden away until called forth by a community event. This is a time and space for regrouping and unifying, for making it known that all share a local identity and origin. Women can go about their daily lives adorning themselves with the traje of their choice, but all participants expressed that it is the red and black cloth that is intricately connected to their inner identities. The red and black identity turns to an outward expression only when necessary. Safety, security, and belonging build their self-esteem during these events and women can know that they are not alone in their struggles, and have not been for well over 100 years. These vital emotions are strengthened during the repetition of the events, and spill over into their non-ritual lives throughout the remainder of the year (Connerton, 1989).

The municipal traje is also seen at important life rights such as weddings and funerals. Not all are wearing it, but without a doubt there is at least one woman with it, the woman being celebrated, whether she is the newly-wed or the recently-departed. The below quote is from an elder whose health is failing and expressed worry that she might not live another year.

I like it [municipal traje] because this is my land, this is what my pueblo of Kaq Jäl is like...because of this, I do not lose it. I don't want to lose it, I don't want to change it for something else. When I die, I will use this [her new folded municipal corte]...when they take me to the cemetery. That's what it's for, I have it prepared. I have my *sábana* that matches...yes, the head wrap also...everything, yes, will be closed up [inside the earth]...my necklace also.

Not only is it a central symbol associated with death, but it is also a central symbol associated with birth. Women in Kaq Jäl continue to use a large piece of cloth identical to the red huipil to wrap their newly-born babes in and carry them on their backs.

Participants shared that during community events, the town center's population swells, as families from villages, even the farthest from the center that rarely come into the central plaza, arrive to participate. Also, individuals and families that may live and work in urban areas of the country will return for the events. As has been documented before, and confirmed by participants in my own work, amazingly, even some families who are estranged from the community as far away as in the U.S. will forego the expense and put aside all obligations to return (Foxen, 2007). If a woman happens to not own the municipal traje, which is usually only the case of women who no longer reside in Kaq Jäl, she will buy it or borrow it. If she cannot manage this, she most likely will not attend for fear of rejection. Because of the elevated status of the community gatherings and the municipal traje's key role during these times and spaces, just as Geertz (1973) theorized, it is for this reason that the traje has reached a sacred space in which it cannot be criticized or questioned. Those who would break these norms would be rejected by the majority. As one participant testified, and others affirmed, "I feel prideful to be from here...when there is a fiesta or an activity, we all agree, we all put on the same clothing...this is good...it's pride...and for the women who no longer use it, I feel really bad...perhaps they don't use it anymore...I look at them negatively."

In the present time and space in which the municipal traje has fallen out of everyday use, younger women have more access to education and travel outside of a local sphere,

outside influences from the Western world and urban Ladino-dominant culture are more present than ever, and economic situations and opportunities are changing for some families, one may imagine that there is less focus on defining one's self based on locality and territorial custom and culture. I would say that the focus has indeed changed but not been lost. If anything, perhaps it has been found. The community event has become a unique time, lived and enacted consecutively for generations, in a local common space, occupied and revered for generations, to show and parade community and ethnic pride through coming together as one in a shared experience, a recharging of the collective consciousness, and the municipal traje. Women take pride in the performative reenactment of events that their grandmothers took part in. This experience represents a shared, common history that has led to a common present in the event itself. In a world quickly turning around the women of Kaq Jäl, the evolution of the red and black cloth from the everyday to a ceremonial garment solely adorning them during the most sacred of times provides a grounding and reinforces who they are and from where they came.

ANALYSIS OF MEMORY AND HISTORICAL PAST, THE KAQ JÄL TRAJE

Tz'olq'omin B'e

K'o kuruqa'
kintz'olq'omij ri nub'e:
xa jewa' kinna'tisaj jun jasach.

Weta xata nutukel kinb'in chonuwach
kin kwin nek'uri kinb'ij chawe jas
ri', ri ucholaj ri sachib'al.

Camino al Revés

De vez en cuando
camino al revés:
es mi modo de recordar.

Si caminara sólo hacia adelante
te podría contar
cómo es el olvido.

--Humberto Ak'abal, 2001.

As I explained in the previous chapter, though the municipal traje of Kaq Jäl has declined in daily use, it is being preserved in ceremonial functions, which in turn preserves local identity and community solidarity. In this chapter I will address another crucial principle identified in the municipal traje: its role as a tool in preserving history and memory. We must remember that though participants spoke enthusiastically about their current sense of pride around the municipal traje and what memories it evokes, most participants did not speak about or freely admit that there was a time when they spoke and thought badly about it when transitioning over to other styles, even though, curiously, they had known of many women who did. As Johannes Fabian (2007) brought to our attention, remembering and forgetting are quite often apart of the same process. Deleting and creating special spaces in the mind for important memories involves molding the identity as appropriate for the immediate time and space. It is my goal here to concentrate on the remembering angle of memory.

Kaq Jäl has only recently been a literate community (M. Aguaré Uz, personal communication, June, 23, 2010). Many citizens, especially women, with whom I have had contact remain illiterate, or would be considered semi-literate. In the past, there was no tradition of recording history or local customs, religion, or myths in written form. Oral communication is of utmost importance in daily life and there are symbols and clues to remembering history and stories that have not been formally recorded. Some of their story is woven into the municipal traje and in this medium preserved in history. Much as

Paul Connerton found to be true in his seminal 1989 work *How Societies Remember*, the enduring presence via the community gatherings of the red and the black cloth aids in the Kaq Jäl citizen's comprehension of time and acts as a trigger that conjures forth memories.

When asked about the community's history, participants frequently told the story summarized in Chapter 3 of the origins of Kaq Jäl. It recounts the explorations of a small group of shepherds from a neighboring community. These were the first official settlers to the area. Participants either opened or closed this historical account with stating that they know this to be true as the *trajes* are virtually the same. Even the antique *manta huipil*, rarely seen in Kaq Jäl, is also seen on occasion in the other community. When questioned about the symbolism of their *traje*, participants replied that it represents where their people came from. As one woman put it, "clothing says a lot [about a person]...I feel good [when wearing the municipal *traje*] because one knows about her origins." Another said, "[my *traje* is] an inheritance, but also I remember myself...where I was born, and how I was born...here in Kaq Jäl...so, also, there are our origins...for example, the origin of Kaq Jäl was from Q'an Jäl²⁷...some traveled here to pastor...it is the same *traje* that they brought here."

Not only do the participants remember the origins of their people through the municipal *traje*, but they also spoke of remembrance of and a communication with the ancestors. It appears to be an important link to the living past as well as the mythic past, a

²⁷ Fictional name.

tool applied to solidify history in the minds of the people. The feelings in the below statements were echoed similarly by all participants.

- [Our] identity is...like...the ancestors, grandparents...language, when they speak in K'ichee'...also, traje...the one from way before...the *típica* from long ago.
- It's like a memory, my clothes from before. It represents the clothes of the elders, of the ancestors...because they dressed themselves in this way...and when I see it I remember the ancestors.
- Our traje is pride for me...it is an identity of the women...we should, in few words, be prideful...because it's beautiful and it's our culture that our ancestors left to us.
- I like the Kaq Jäl style. I like it a lot because it has a beautiful color, also with it I remember my grandparents, my ancestors—that they used it...and the story that my father tells me—that my grandmothers, before, they weave, they made it...and this is a beautiful thing. Both my father's mother and my mother's mother could weave. They made the huipiles, and I learned how to do it too. I can make the huipiles from here.
- I feel good when I'm wearing it because I remember our ancestors...they used it and also one has to wear it and not leave it...yes, I feel good wearing it.

The municipal traje also provides a connection to a spiritual past and a distinct piece of Maya mythology and cosmology that most Kaq Jäl women are versed in. Just as Sheldon Annis (1987) recorded that the women “weave to create ‘symbolic texts’...they ‘say something’ in the silent, obscure language of color, pattern, and design,” (p. 109) I also found that the women of Kaq Jäl had been weaving symbols representing a mythic past, as real to them as any grandparent's life had been, into their traje for generations. With the burning of the majority of the sacred texts of the Maya by the Spanish conquistadors, the Maya hid their histories under layers of symbols that supported their memory (Hart, 2008). Connerton (1989) discusses that ritual and myth could be analyzed

as “collective symbolic texts,” and that the “mnemonic power” of a sacred event, such as events in Kaq Jäl that require the municipal traje, triggers the participants’ memories of mythic events and figures. I would extend his theory by stating that traje, as well, in and of itself could be considered a collective symbolic text. There is symbolism in the colors and the designs of the Kaq Jäl traje that translate as the blood of the people and various sacred body parts; the four cardinal directions; life and death; light and darkness; sunrise and sunset; the rainbow; supernatural creatures from mythology and the creation myth; and the connections between people and nature. The traje is preserving a spiritual identity from a pre-colonial past in the memories of the women. Much of the above-listed symbolism in the traje mirrors images surrounding the representations of both Ixchel, deity of weaving mentioned in Chapter 2, and Xmukane, the first grandmother from the sacred creation myth of the K’ichee’ Maya, the Popol Vuh (Preuss, 1988; Stanzione, 2003; Tedlock, 1996). Participants discussed the beauty of the braided municipal head wrap as being Q’uq’umatz, a sacred serpent that they said is no longer seen. This feathered serpent is a significant figure from the creation myth (Preuss, 1988). Also the image of a serpent coiled on the head and the hair brought forward in a top knot (sometimes seen among married women in Kaq Jäl) are unmistakable images associated with both Ixchel and Xmukane (Preuss, 1988; Stanzione, 2003; Wellmeier, 1998). The municipal traje evokes histories and memories of spaces and times of grandmothers known as well as spaces and times that involved the first grandmother.



Figure 1: Contemporary Kaq Jäl Traje: (from top to bottom) Mid-section of the corte; Top section of the red huipil; Mid-section of textile traditionally used for carrying things.

A woman can see the municipal traje, whether within the community itself or far from the community, and immediately know through *the grammar of meaning* spoken through the traje that she shares memories with the wearer of the traje. They have experienced the same local history, have lived the same time and space, and have equal knowledge of sacred information surrounding important mythology and cosmology particular to Kaq Jäl.

CONCLUSIONS

My findings indicate that though the municipal traje is no longer worn on a daily basis, or even often, it has secured an important niche in the society of Kaq Jäl. It has been transformed from the mundane to the sacred. Throughout history the Maya have been masters of survival, adaptation, and redefining themselves when necessary (Stanzione, 2003). When the municipal traje declined in daily use as a result of other styles coming into the community it was given a new pronounced meaning in the ritual life of the community. The community gatherings serve as a stage for performance that gives way to preservation of local identity and traje and aids in the memories of both male and female citizens. I have mentioned that women did not commonly use the word *loss* when discussing the municipal traje, but spoke more about *change*. However, when I initiated a discussion around the future of Maya traje use in general in Kaq Jäl, the word *loss* was actually used more frequently. While women do not view traje use as presently under great threat of being lost, they do question the future as more and more young women become formally educated and leave village life. The last section to my

questionnaire posed the following: *Hypothetically, let us say that traje disappears from Kaq Jäl in the future. Would female identity in the community change?* I wanted to gauge how women feel about the potential of a decline or loss of traje should that take place in the future of the community. Some participants said that this would never occur, that traje would never cease to exist in Kaq Jäl. Other participants feared a future without traje. Only the youngest participant in the study initially did not attach some level of negativity to the idea of traje being left behind. She did later on in the interview discuss what she thought would be the negative effects of the loss of traje in her community. If traje is central to female identity in Kaq Jäl, as I found in my research, what would female identity there consist of without traje? I have highlighted some of the participants' voices below.

- This will not happen here.
- If there was no traje? I'm not sure I really understand your question. If there was no traje there would be a great sadness. But this will not come to pass. Life would be different without traje. To be of another culture would be hypocrisy!
- The origins of the individual would be lost...if I left behind my traje, I would practically be forgetting where I am from, my identity. I am indigenous, and I cannot forget this. [Discontinuing traje's use] would be very bad, this would be negative. The community would change a lot without traje.
- This would be very bad. It is necessary to be Maya, that they [younger women] are not mixing things [with Western styles]. Kaq Jäl would be lost. No longer could you see it if no one had their traje, their black crown, black corte, red huipil. What would this be? What is this place? [Presently] you still see it and know, ah,

this is Kaq Jäl. Look at what that *Doña*²⁸ has on. That's how they know that this is Kaq Jäl.²⁹

- One could not differentiate between who is Maya and who is Ladina. Because of that, yes, it would affect us.
- There would be *un choque*³⁰ [if there was no longer use of traje in the future]. One would not know where she came from...searching for an identity...but because of the changes that would have happened, she wouldn't know. As of right now, we can do something to not lose it...but if people don't do anything, I think that it will be lost. Our grandparents, before, they would scorn us if one used a different traje...and now the grandmothers are dying. Without traje the identity of women here would be different. Without Maya clothing, a part of the culture would be lost. I know that I am Maya inside, but something must be externalized. From far away, how will someone know I am Maya or where I come from? A part of existence will be lost...supposedly, there is the outside and the inside...if there is no external, I don't think it is possible to only live on the inside.
- People would change a lot [without traje]...values would change...because this is a value. The way life is lived would change a lot. [Female identity] would be lost. Identity would change in the way that we act and the way that we think.

In these interview quotes, the importance of origins (discussed in the preceding section on memory), locative information embedded in traje, ethnic expression and representation, and community values (discussed in the section on reauthentication) are all expressed. The idea of the loss of these integral aspects of individual and community life, all connected to traje, is feared by the participants. Even though many of the women discussed Western clothing having its specific functions which are acceptable, they

²⁸ The participant uses the Spanish title *Doña* here, indicating that it would likely be an older woman who one might observe wearing the municipal traje.

²⁹ While most participants chose to comment on the hypothetical loss of Maya traje in the community, this participant chose to discuss what may occur should the municipal traje be lost. This is the only instance in the interviews in which the word loss is used around the subject of the municipal traje, and this is only in reference to a possible future outcome.

³⁰ The Spanish *un choque*, translated into English as “a shock,” colloquially “a wreck” or “a discord.”

always returned to the theme of traje as being an important cultural marker that they are proud of and ultimately refuse to completely abandon. I could not help but think of a future that could exist in which Maya women in Western clothing would discuss how Maya traje has its specific function(s), but this possibility was actually never raised by participants.

When participants were asked about how they might repress the disappearance of traje should that become a reality in the future they responded by asserting that as the carriers of their culture, it is in their hands, the hands of mothers, grandmothers, and teachers, to pass on to the young children their cultural ties, particularly the K'ichee' language and the use of traje. These cultural ties would undoubtedly include the communal ritual gatherings. A few of the participants who are currently dressing their youngest daughters in Western clothing, because it is cheaper to do so, said that they aspire to transition their daughters to traje once they are young women.

Besides the community gatherings serving to preserve local identity and traje, the only secondary school has implemented the use of the municipal corte as a part of the mandatory uniform for girls. Here we see that a part of the past is attached to the present in the secondary school's female student. This redefined antiquity travels with Kaq Jäl's female leaders of tomorrow into a future realm. There was a recent time in history when women of the community were all considered poor, rural, and uneducated, and their municipal traje had become a symbol of this portrayal. And now, even after the municipal traje's strengthening of image due to its decline in daily use and rise in ritual use, it has further evolved into a symbolic representation of future, education, success, and female

empowerment. With the innovation of female students wearing the municipal corte, it is taking on the image of a young woman who will have the opportunity to travel and work in higher paying jobs outside of rural life, unlike Kaq Jäl women of the past. When participants were asked to describe the municipal traje, many of them, both young and old, in addition to discussing history and origins, commented that it is a sign that a young girl is studying. This is where the “traditional” meets the contemporary. This change in the image of the traje, I believe, could have an effect on its preservation. Taking on positive characteristics that better fit the current lives of young women, they may adopt it again in more than ritual use. In the school girl, there is the convergence of the past, the present, and the future space and time of her immediate place of origin.

Even through change and adaptation, there has been continuity in the municipal traje in the sense that it has remained a representation of place and heritage. It is true that a shared Maya identity is solid in Guatemala’s Western Highlands, but this research has shown that there is still a strong tendency towards local affiliation and identification in the municipality of Kaq Jäl. Though the new generations of Maya women in Kaq Jäl are viewing themselves as dynamic leaders free to explore new opportunities, there remains a great deal of pride and respect for their origins and municipal traje. For them, the community gatherings are a space to observe the pride and the connectedness of the group. This is a time to parade and to show pure Mayanness, local pride, and knowledge and allegiance to Kaq Jäl. The young woman who is chosen as the municipal beauty queen during the *feria* must actually pass a test on local culture and customs, including in-depth knowledge of the municipal traje, without any mistakes. And a woman would

not dare to arrive in anything but her best municipal traje. There is high peer pressure during these gatherings to be purely Kaq Jäl-ian. These actions are working to preserve, inculcate, and ingrain local culture and identity. The changing patterns of traje use equal the changing patterns of identity. In a quickly changing world, the women of Kaq Jäl are redefining and reworking an old concept, in the process giving it new life, and reconfirming their cultural roots and local ethnicity to survive in the here and now. The traje has both “changed *and* endured” (Hendrickson, 1995, p. 7), and they are redefining what it means to be from and live in the community of Kaq Jäl in the present time and space.

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